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AUTHOR Cooney, T. M.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Examining parent-child support patterns over the life-course reveals variations in who plays the predominant provider and receiver roles. Although children can expect to play a minimal role in supporting their parents until the parents reach old age, a divorce in the parents' middle years may lead them to call on their children for help. Male (N=16) and female (N=16) college students who had experienced the divorce of their parents completed questionnaires about patterns of family support. In follow-up questionnaires, the students rated changes in the amount of support they both give and receive from parents, siblings, and grandparents. Questions focused on financial support, emotional support, and provision of goods and services. The results revealed that the majority of sons and daughters experienced altered patterns of exchange with their parents following divorce. Generally, their exchange relationships intensified, as both parents and children increased the assistance they provided one another. The analyses suggested that the gender of the child influenced post-divorce patterns of support; sons were more likely than daughters to increase the support they received from their parents following divorce. The gender of the parent also emerged as an important determinant of post-divorce exchange patterns. (NRB)

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Young Adults in Patterns of Intergenerational Exchange: The Effects of Parental Divorce

T. M. Cooney, G. O. Hagestad & M. A. Smyer

The Pennsylvania State University

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YOUNG ADULTS IN PATTERNS OF INTERGENERATIONAL EXCHANGE:

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE

There is general agreement that families today can be described as "modified extended families" (Litwak, 1965). This term illustrates the fact that although family units are housed independently, they still remain connected and provide important support in times of need. We find high levels of interdependence among adults in modern families, with the central connection being that of the parent-child link (Shanas, 1979).

Examining parent-child support patterns over the life-course, we see variation in who plays the predominant "provider" and "receiver" roles. Prevailing patterns of parent-child exchange are certainly governed by social timetables. In early childhood, parents are expected to be the predominant providers for their children. And, because members of our society subscribe to the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), we anticipate that at some point later in life the flow of support between parents and children will gradually change. Such changes in support patterns are frequently observed in the children's middle age and later years as they begin to assume the role of care-giver for their parents (Brody, 1984). Blenkner (1965) uses the term "filial maturity" to indicate that adult children are prepared to reciprocate earlier support from their parents and accept increasing dependence from them.

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However, earlier in children's adult years, parent-child roles seem less clear. It is likely that when offspring reach adulthood, there is a renogotiation of exchange relationships. Parents and children are reassessing the flow of assistance on various dimensions of exchange in their relationship and testing new limits with regard to what they may request and expect from one another (Turner, 1970).

The nature of the young adult world generally ensures that renogiation will be a gradual process. Typically offspring are eased into roles of greater independence and responsibility for themselves. For example, we may see young adults gaining some independence by living away from their parents' home, yet the parents may still provide a large share of their financial resources. Such assistance from parents has been documented even after adult children marry (Adams, 1968; Hill & Associates, 1970). Troll (1971) suggests that as long as parents have the available resources, they will continue to serve primarily as providers rather than recipients of support from their children. Therefore, children can expect to play a minimal role in supporting their parents until the parents reach old age. At that time, parents' supply of resources may decrease, and their needs, particularly for services and emotional support, may increase.

There are unexpected transitions, however, which may confront parents and children, and upset the normal "timeschedules" in their relationship. Divorce is one such transition, because it generally involves a great deal of financial strain and emotional stress. Therefore, it is likely to be one experience which alters individuals' ability to assist family members. This paper addresses how parental

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divorce affects patterns of exchange for young adults. A divorce in the parents' middle years may lead parents to call on their children for help. For young adults, sudden requests for help from parents may disrupt the gradual nature of the renogiation process discussed above. Patents' need for support may require accelerated reversal of earlier exchange patterns. Such requests for early filial maturity may create problems for young adults because they are called upon to provide support for parents well before the time in their lives when such responsibilities are expected.

Evidence from a study of couples divorcing in mid-life, (Hagestad & Smyer, 1982; Hagestad, Smyer & Stierman, 1984) suggests that parents do in fact turn to their adult children for help during the divorce process. In fact, several respondents in that study expressed concern that their own needs for help might interfere with their children's ability to progress with their own adult lives. This was particularly the case for mothers.

The central purpose of this paper is to explore the nature of post-divorce support patterns, focusing specifically on how intergenerational exchanges change and what types of support are most likely to change. Both parent-child and grandparent-grandchild relations are considered. In addition, the gender of the young adult will be assessed as a factor which shapes support patterns following divorce. Women have been called the "kin-keepers" of families. They frequently play the role of family mediator (Hagestad et al., 1984) and are central in maintaining ties between generations (Adams, 1968). Numerous studies have revealed that daughters are the major source of

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help for their older parents (Brody, 1984; Lopata, 1973; Treas, 1977; Troll, 1982). It may be that gender is also an important influence on young adults' responsiveness to parents' needs for support following divorce.

In summary, the work presented here addresses two questions: First, how does divorce alter patterns of family exchange for young adults? Second, are there gender differences in such changes?

THE STUDY

SUBJECTS

The participants for this exploratory study of parental divorce in young adulthood were solicited from undergraduate classes at a large state university. Twenty-one women and eighteen men, all between the ages of 18 and 23, volunteered to complete the study questionnaire and participate in a follow-up interview. All of these students had experienced the divorce of their parents three years or less prior to the study.

An earlier report from this project discussed how many of these students experienced significant disruptions as a result of the divorce (Cooney, Klock, Smyer & Hagestad, 1984). This paper focuses on only 32 (16 men and 16 women) of the original 39 participants. These students responded to a follow-up mailed questionnaire which asked about patterns of family support.

PROCEDURE

In the follow-up questionnaire, the students were asked to rate changes in the amount of support they both give and receive from

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parents, siblings and grandparents. The types of support identified were adapted from Hill and associates' (1970) study of three-generation families. Questions focused on financial support, emotional support and provision of goods or services. Respondents separately rated changes in the receipt and provision of the above types of support, with particular family members, as having:

1 - decreased a great deal since the divorce.
2 - decreased somewhat since the divorce.
3 - not changed since the divorce.
4 - increased somewhat since the divorce.
5 - increased a great deal since the divorce.

It is important to keep in mind that scores represented type and degree of perceived change in each support area with each family member. They did not represent absolute levels of supportive behavior.

RESULTS

Exchange Relations With Parents

The discussion of results will be guided by the two questions raised above: Are patterns of exchange between parents and young adult offspring altered following divorce? And, are there differences between sons and daughters in these post-divorce patterns?

A classification scheme was devised to categorize individuals with regard to changes in both receipt and provision of support with

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each parent. Respondents could have experienced one of the following four types of change in support with each parent following the divorce:

- Intensification - Both receipt and provision of support increased.

- Decreased Involvement - Both receipt and provision of support decreased.

- Unreciprocated Provision of Support - Provision of support for the parent increased while there was no change or a decrease in receipt of support.

- Unreciprocated Receipt of Support - Receipt of support from the parent increased while there was no change or a decrease in provision of support.

Those experiencing no changes in either receipt or provision of support were put in the "No Change" category. The classification scheme was collapsed across types of support, so that categories represented patterns of exchange in general, rather than for specific domains.

Table One-A shows how sons and daughters saw exchange patterns with their mothers change following the divorce. Comparable data for young adults and their fathers are presented in Table One-B. Examination of both tables shows that the majority of sons and daughters experienced altered patterns of exchange with their parents following divorce. There were only three cases where no change in exchange patterns with one of the parents was reported. For these two daughters and one son exchange was altered with the other parent,

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however. Therefore, none of the respondents escaped altered exchange patterns with their parents following divorce.

Emotional support was the most frequently mentioned type of support that both sons and daughters increasingly provided for their mothers and fathers. This finding was expected since young adult students probably have limited material resources (e.g. goods and money) to share. And, because most of them are living away from their parents nine months of the year, they are probably unable to provide services on a regular basis. Different types of support were increasingly received from parents by sons and daughters, however. The greatest percentage of daughters received increases in services from their mothers and emotional support from their fathers. Sons, on the other hand, were most likely to report increases in emotional support from their mothers and financial support from their fathers. The greater likelihood of cross-gender increases in emotional support may suggest that pre-divorce levels of emotional support between same-sex parent and child were already high, leaving little room for improvement. The fact that mothers increased provision of services and fathers provision of money may reflect differences in the types of resources the two parents have greatest access to following divorce (Hagestad, Smyer & Stierman, 1984).

The majority of alterations in exchange relationships were toward intensification of the exchange bonds for sons and daughters. Both sons and daughters, however, were more likely to report intensification in exchange with their mothers than their fathers. In contrast, decreased involvement was more likely to occur with fathers

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than mothers. This difference, however, was totally accounted for by daughters. One son reported decreased involvement with his mother and one with his father. No daughters reported decreased involvement with their mothers, while five daughters did so in the relationship with their fathers.

In six cases, exchange relations were altered in the direction of the children increasing their provision of support more than they experienced increased receipt of support from a parent. There were few gender differences in this type of unreciprocated provision of support, as three sons and three daughters experienced this type of altered exchange following divorce. It is important to point out that all but one of the cases of unreciprocated provision of support by the young adults were experienced in relation to their mothers. The exception involved a young woman who experienced an unreciprocated increased in support for both her parents. This finding, along with the tendency for intensification to occur more with mothers than fathers, may suggest that mothers are in greater need of support than fathers following divorce. Alternatively, these findings may suggest that mothers are more effective and/or willing than fathers to seek help from family members. Previous work by Hagestad, Smyer and Stierman (1984) found that middle-age divorcing men were less likely than women to report calling on family members for help during the divorce process.

There were nine cases of exchange relations where adult children increased receipt of support from a parent without increasing their provision of support for that parent. Six of these cases involved

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sons. The trend for sons to experience unreciprocated receipt of support from a parent was particularly strong in relation to their fathers. Four of the six cases of unreciprocated receipt of support for sons were from their fathers only, and two cases were from both the mother and father. For the daughters, two of the three cases of unreciprocated receipt of support were from their mothers and one was from a father. Here again, it appears that fathers may have more available resources than mothers, as they were more likely to provide unreciprocated support for their children, particularly in the form of money and goods.

In summary, both sons and daughters were subject to new patterns of exchange of support with at least one parent following divorce. Generally, their exchange relationships intensified, as both parents and children increased the assistance they provided one another. Intensification of exchange relations occurred more often for mothers than fathers. The deterioration of exchange bonds occurred less frequently, with the majority of such cases involving fathers and daughters. When unreciprocated increases in support for parents occurred, it was more likely to be in provision of support for mothers, for both sons and daughters, and in receipt of support from fathers, particularly for sons.

The interaction of the two exchange patterns that resulted with mothers and fathers following divorce, provides a more complete picture of these young adults' post-divorce experiences. All five of the daughters and the one son who decreased involvement with their fathers, intensified relations with their mothers. Similarly, the one

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son who decreased involvement with his mother intensified the exchange he practiced with his father. This finding suggests that loss of strong ties with one parent may have resulted in some type of compensatory intensification with the other parent. Or, extreme intensification of bonds with one parent may have led to the dissolution of exchange relations with the other parent. In either case, none of these young adults experienced total loss of involvement with both of their parents following divorce.

Intensification of exchange relationships with both parents was more likely to occur for sons than for daughters. It appears that daughters discriminated more than sons between their mothers and fathers in their post-divorce relations. A report of intensification with one parent was more likely for sons than daughters to indicate intensification with the other parent as well. Over half of reports of intensification by sons involved intensification with both parents. For daughters, only one-third of reports of intensification were regarding intensification with both parents.

An equal number of sons and daughters intensified exchange relations with one parent, while increasing unreciprocated provision of support for the other parent (in all cases the mother). More sons than daughters intensified exchange relations with one parent while increasing unreciprocated receipt of support from the other parent. There was a trend for both sons and daughters to receive unreciprocated increases in support from the parent of the same sex. This trend was particularly strong for sons. Overall, it appears that mothers were more likely than fathers to be the target of post-divorce

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change in exchange relations, for both sons and daughters. While most of this exchange was reciprocal, any imbalances were toward unreciprocated receipt of support by the mothers. Fathers were more likely to be the providers of unreciprocated support for their children.

Exchange Relations With Grandparents

Ten of the 16 men in the sample, and 14 of the 16 women had at least one surviving paternal grandparent. Comparably, 11 of the 16 men and 14 of the 16 women had a living maternal grandparent. These subgroups of men and women with surviving grandparents were included in the following analyses. The same classification scheme that was used with the parent data was employed for data on grandparents. Tables Two-A and Two-B present percentage breakdowns for each type of altered exchange for paternal and maternal grandparents, respectively. Because the same grandsons and granddaughters are not necessarily represented in each table, the interaction of patterns between the two sides of the family are not addressed here.

Granddaughters were more likely than grandsons to alter exchange relations with their grandparents following divorce. However, this difference is almost totally accounted for by the patterns that emerged with their maternal grandparents. While 50 percent of grandsons and 50 percent of granddaughters experienced change in exchange relations with paternal grandparents, 55 percent of grandsons and 79 percent of granddaughters reported altered exchange relations with their maternal grandparents. This difference in the latter two

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figures is illustrated in the intensification column of the table four, where over 50 percent more granddaughters than grandsons intensified relations with their maternal grandparents.

Similar to results obtained with the parents, granddaughters were more likely than grandsons to differentiate between maternal and paternal grandparents in post-divorce exchange relations. Comparing tables for maternal and paternal grandparents, somewhat similar percentages of grandsons fall into the various categories of exchange in the two tables. However, for granddaughters, the figures are much more divergent.

Emotional support was the type of help most frequently altered between grandparents and grandchildren following divorce. Grandchildren reported increases in provision of services for their grandparents as the second most frequent change in support. On the receiving end, increases in the receipt of money was second to receipt of emotional support from grandparents.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In general, the analyses suggest that gender of the child did have some influence on post-divorce patterns of support. Sons were more likely than daughters to increase the support they received from their parents following divorce. Also, the increased support they generally received was either emotional or financial support, while daughters gathered more emotional support and services. Sons were also less likely than daughters to discriminate between their mothers and fathers in post-divorce exchange patterns. The gender of the

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parent also emerged as an important determinant of post-divorce exchange patterns. Not only did mothers and fathers provide different types of support for their children, they were not equally discriminating in the support they gave to male and female children. There was a strong tendency for fathers of sons to increase their provision of support and fathers of daughters to decrease the support they provided. For mothers, the gender of the child was not as influencial in determining post-divorce patterns: the patterns of support for mothers of daughters and sons were generally quite similar. Finally, mothers were more often the recipients of support than fathers, from both sons and daughters.

Exchange relations were more likely to be altered with parents than grandparents following divorce, yet a sizable proportion of both grandsons and granddaughters did alter exchange relations with the older generation. Exchange relations with the maternal side of the family appeared to be more sensitive to change following divorce. This tendency was particularly strong for granddaughters.

We recognize that observed changes in family support patterns may have occurred because of the third generations' move into adulthood, rather than because of the divorce. Without a control group of young adults from intact families, we cannot untangle the effects due to age and those due to divorce. Yet, the exploratory nature of this study helps us identify issues to be addressed in future research which will include a control group. Furthermore, the gender differences and variation in patterns between mothers and fathers, and maternal and paternal grandparents suggests that there may be other factors at work

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here, beyond age-related changes in exchange relationships.

The discussion of these results will focus briefly on three areas:

1. Gender differences in young adults' experience with exchange following this family transition.
2. Intensification of matrilineal bonds.
3. Implications of post-divorce exchange patterns for the future life-course of young adults.

Gender Differences

These data suggest that sons and daughters are affected differently and respond differently to family change. The fact that sons benefitted more than daughters from post-divorce support from their fathers and daughters reported more decreases than sons in support from their fathers was expected. An earlier report from this same project (Cooney, et al., 1984) indicated that daughters experienced a great deal more disruption in relations with their fathers following divorce than sons did. Therefore, daughters were not expected to be recipients of increased support from their fathers. Also, this finding may relate to prior evidence that daughters report more anger at their fathers than sons do following divorce (Cooney et al., 1984). The work by Fine, Moreland and Schwebel (1983), comparing young adults from intact and early-divorce families on various parent-child factors also sheds some light on this issue. They found that while socio-economic status was not related to the nature of post-divorce father-child relationships, it was related to the level

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of anger subjects reported towards their fathers following divorce. Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds reported higher levels of anger at their fathers. These authors suggest that adult children may be angry with their fathers because of perceived changes in standards of living following the divorce. This argument gathers support from our findings. Not only were daughters more likely to be angry with their fathers, they were also less likely than sons to experience increased support from their fathers and more likely than sons to experience decreased support following divorce.

The fact that sons were less likely to increase provision of support than daughters following divorce may be explained by differences between the genders in their socioemotional foci during early adulthood. Gilligan (1982) suggests that men's decisions and behaviors in adulthood center on independence and achievement, while women's concerns center on maintaining connections with others. While men focus on rights, women concentrate on responsibilities. It is possible that women's increased support for parents and their intensification of exchanges with grandparents following divorce are illustrations of their concern for connections. Meanwhile, one young man's comment illustrated his emphasis on his right to receive support. Although he was not speaking to his father following the divorce he did not reject his father's financial help: "...I always had someone else in the family relay the message that I needed money. There were points where I was just going to say 'to hell with you pal (father) - I don't want your damn money'...". Yet, he went on to say that he agreed with his mother that his dad did owe it to him to pay

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for his college education.

Similar to the explanation above, women's roles as kin-keepers were reflected by their relatively greater responsiveness than men to parents and grandparents following the divorce. Their assistance did not go unreciprocated in most cases, however, since they generally experienced increased receipt of support, especially from female family members.

Intensification of Matrilineal Bonds

For those interested in intergenerational relations the strengthened link between young women and their maternal grandparents following divorce is of interest. Previous work by Cherlin and associates (Cherlin et al., 1984) also reports a greater likelihood of increased assistance and more contact with maternal than paternal grandparents following divorce. Cherlin and his colleagues attribute this difference in assistance to the fact that women generally have custody of their children following divorce, and thus receive assistance from their parents. This argument seems to suggest that if men had custody, the children would also maintain strong ties with their paternal grandparents and obtain support from them.

Hagestad (1984) does not consider custody to be the critical factor at work in the weakened ties to paternal kin. Rather, she suggests that the loss of paternal lineage contact and the maintenance of matrilineal ties reflect women's roles as family kin-keepers. Women manage family relations and contact for both sides of the family. When a couple divorces, according to Hagestad, the man may

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lose his kin-keeper. Without the guidance of his wife even his relationship and contact with his parents might suffer.

Certainly our group of young adults was not subject to custody decisions. Yet, we saw the intensification of matrilineal bonds for young women. It appears that their kin-keeping abilities and those of their mothers allowed them to hold onto their relationships with their maternal grandparents. At the same time we were more likely to observe decreased involvement with the paternal lineage for women. Earlier results from this project report that daughters were more likely than sons to improve relations with their mothers following divorce (Cooney et al., 1984). The results presented here suggest that the intensification of mother-daughter bonds extends up the generational ladder as well. Of the 14 women with surviving maternal grandparents, all but one experienced some type of increased involvement (either in receiving and/or providing support) with their mothers following divorce. For 10 of these 13 women (77%) there was also intensification of bonds or increased provision or receipt of support from matrilineal grandparents following divorce. As Hagestad (1985) states elsewhere, it appears that the quality of grandparent-grandchild bonds depends on the work of the middle generation kin keeper - the mother. Furthermore, this matrilineal focus is illustrated by the fact that the young women in the sample all reported that most change with their maternal grandparents was in their relationship with the grandmother, even when the grandfather was still living.

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Implications For The Future Life Course

Certainly, the altered exchange patterns observed in this group of young adults, particularly with regard to women's strengthened bonds with their parents and grandparents, raise some questions about their life course. Our results suggest that the strong bonds between mothers and daughters may create future strain for daughters for two reasons. First, mothers may require more assistance than fathers following divorce. Therefore, a daughter's closeness to her mother may leave her in a position of vulnerability when her mother needs help. Second, it appears that mothers are much more likely than fathers to be effective at seeking help, which increases daughters' chances of being called upon to serve as providers for their mothers. The comment of one young woman (classified an unreciprocated provider of support to both parents) depicts her apprehension for parent-caring in her future: "Sometimes I think about what she's (mother) going to do like later on because she does have arthritis...Suppose something would happen like if she couldn't walk or something. I know that I could never - I don't want my parents to live with me and that's just that! I'm not going to spend my life taking care of my parents and sometimes I think that my mother would expect me to." This same woman had already expressed her mother's disappointment that she had chosen to go away to college rather than stay at home and attend a local school.

Overall, it appears from our results that some of these young women have already emerged as family kin-keepers in early adulthood. They were more likely than young men to respond to divorce by

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increasing the levels of support they were providing for family members. What impact this will have on their future life-course is questionable. Whatever consequences it does create, however, will surely have repercussions for the lives of other family members, due to the interdependence of lives (Pruchno, Blow & Smyer, 1984). Thus, the divorce in one generation may alter adult life careers and exchange patterns in three generations.

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TABLE ONE-A

POST-DIVORCE EXCHANGE WITH MOTHERS

Frequencies

	Intensification	Decreased Involvement	Unreciprocated Giving	Unreciprocated Receiving	No Change
Daughters n=16	10	0	3	2	1
Sons n=16	10	1	3	2	0

TABLE ONE-B

POST-DIVORCE EXCHANGE WITH FATHERS

Frequencies

	Intensification	Decreased Involvement	Unreciprocated Giving	Unreciprocated Receiving	No Change
Daughters n=16	8	5	1	1	1
Sons n=16	8	1	0	6	1

TABLE TWO-A

POST-DIVORCE EXCHANGE WITH PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS

Frequencies

	Intensification	Decreased Involvement	Unreciprocated Giving	Unreciprocated Receiving	No Change
Granddaughters n=14	29%	14%	0%	7%	50%
Grandsons n=10	40%	0%	0%	10%	50%

TABLE TWO-B

POST-DIVORCE EXCHANGE WITH MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS

Frequencies*

	Intensification	Decreased Involvement	Unreciprocated Giving	Unreciprocated Receiving	No Change
Granddaughters n=14	71%	0%	0%	7%	21%
Grandsons n=11	27%	9%	9%	9%	45%

*Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.